

Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study  
Pierce, Easton, Russell, Bunker, Gardner Houses  
known as the Orange Street Block  
15, 17, 19, 21 and 23 Orange Street  
Nantucket  
Nantucket County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-947

HABS  
MASS  
10-NANT  
76U-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

ORANGE AND UNION STREETS NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY  
PIERCE, EASTON, RUSSELL, BUNKER, GARDNER HOUSES  
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Location: Numbers 15, 17, 19, 21 and 23 Orange Street  
(on west side), Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owners: #15 -- Mrs. David W. Swain  
#17 -- Mrs. William F. Howe  
#19 -- Mr. George Cameron  
#21 -- Mrs. Richard M. Everett  
#23 -- Miss Leila Laughlin McKnight

Present Use: Residences

Brief Statement  
of Significance: Only row houses in Nantucket; part of the Orange  
and Union Streets Neighborhood Study (MASS-1014).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

#15 -- 1831 -- Philip H. Folger  
1832 -- Cyrus Peirce  
1836 -- Eliza Cary (Mrs. Thomas Cary)  
1856 -- Jeanette G. Morton  
1864 -- John W. Macy  
1876 -- James H. Gibbs  
1879 -- Charlotte C. Pearson; her son Rear  
Admiral Seth M. Ackley; his widow  
Edith Ackley  
1908 -- James G. Hill -- Julia P. Hill, Exec.  
1918 -- Jessie P. Knevals  
Anna Knevals Swain -- David W. Swain  
to date -- Marjorie Swain (Mrs. David W. Swain)

#17 -- 1831 -- Philip H. Folger  
1831 -- James Easton  
1869 -- Captain Arvin Baker  
members of the Baker family, including Edward  
W., Charles H. and Louise S.  
1922 -- Grace Davis Barnes  
1941 -- Landon Barnes  
1946 -- Margaret Howe (Mrs. William F. Howe)

#19 -- 1831 -- Philip H. Folger  
1831 -- Thomas Russell

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1857 -- Alfred Macy -- Mrs. Alfred Macy  
Ann Mitchell Macy, heir of Mrs. Macy  
1902 -- Rachel W. Brown  
Heirs of Rachel W. Brown  
1918 -- Norman Merryman  
1922 -- Ellen S. Swain and Susan Starbuck  
1931 -- Hattie Clark Sawyer  
1937 -- Albert A. Fee et ux  
1944 -- Phoebe Pancoast  
to date -- Mr. George Cameron

#21 -- 1831 -- Philip H. Folger  
1831 -- Joshua Bunker  
1840 -- John W. Barrett; his daughters, including  
Eliza Bovey  
1872 -- Ann S. Coffin (Mrs. Horace Coffin)  
1883 -- William Brouwer  
1883 -- George B. Upton  
1914 -- Mrs. Minnie R. Sickles  
1916 -- Isabel B. Sutphen  
1923 -- Anna C. Baxter  
1927 -- Richard M. Everett  
1964 -- to date -- Madeleine W. Everett  
(Mrs. Richard M. Everett)

#23 -- 1831 -- Philip H. Folger  
1831 -- George B. Gardner  
1848 -- Edward M. Gardner  
1876 -- Phebe Ann Gardner  
1887 -- Mrs. Hannah B. Sharp  
1893 -- Mabel S. S. Hartman  
1913 -- Annie B. Howard  
Leila Laughlin Carlisle (Mrs. G. Lister  
Carlisle)  
to date -- Leila Laughlin McKnight (Miss)

(Abstract: Records Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Mass.)

2. Date of erection: 1831. Between 1820 and 1830 Philip H. Folger, a successful whaling merchant, who owned the house at the corner of Main and Orange Streets nearby, purchased lots on Wesco Hill (now Orange Street), the highest land in the town. Most of this land had been the homestead of Latham Bunker. In 1831 Philip H. Folger built the long, two-story wooden structure known as "The Block". It is generally agreed by historians that he was helped financially in this project by his affluent father-in-law, Levi Starbuck, who lived in the mansion on Fair Street now known as "Ships Inn". Another surmise is that it was built by Philip Folger for ownership by the five men who immediately bought each separate house. Most of these remained in the respective families for many years.  
(Abstract: Writings of Henry W. Worth and Dr. Will Gardner)

3. Architect: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The five front steps and five front doors still remain. On the west side of the buildings was left a passageway called "Bunker's Court", communicating with Fair Street. While old deeds called the west side of Orange Street "Wesco Hill", the bluff on the east side over-looking Union Street was known as "Quanaty", an Indian name meaning "Long Hill".
5. Notes on alterations and additions: All of the houses in The Block have been modernized. #17 is the least changed as to the interior lay-out. The addition of a second story bay window on the front of #23 changed its appearance from the others.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

It is notable that the owners and occupants of The Block comprised some of the aristocratic residents of Nantucket. It has always been a popular piece of property occupied by persons of high standing. For instance:

#15 -- The owner in 1832 was Cyrus Pierce, principal of the High School in Nantucket. He came here to conduct a private school in the first house in The Block and later became the first principal of Nantucket's first high school, started in 1838. A few years later Pierce left the Island to accept the appointment of principal of the first Normal School in America, opening at Lexington, Mass. A grade school in Nantucket is named in his honor: the Cyrus Pierce School.

The house was later owned by Mrs. Charlotte Pearson and her son Seth M. Ackley, the latter destined to become Rear Admiral Ackley. He was born in Nantucket of seafaring ancestors and lived in that home of hardy and adventurous seamen (his father was a sea-captain, with whom as a boy he had made a voyage to California), and he was well prepared for the Navy. An examination of his official record shows that not only was his actual sea-duty extensive and varied, but that when given shore-duty, his scientific and professional bent led him to the Coast Survey, the Naval Observatory, torpedo duty, the Naval War College, the Hydrographic Office, and lighthouse duty. At various times he held the highly important position of Hydrographic Inspector of the U. S. Coast Survey and of Naval Secretary of the Lighthouse Board. Admiral Ackley is buried on Nantucket within sound of the sea he loved, on the Island which was the dearest spot on earth to him.

(Abstract: Nantucket, A History by Douglas-Lithgow.)

#17 -- In 1831 the owner was James Easton, a successful Nantucket jeweler. Silver marked J. Easton, J. Easton 2nd, or Easton & Sanford is much sought after and highly treasured in Nantucket today.

A later resident and owner of this house was Captain Arvin Baker whose daughter, Louise S. Baker was for eight years an outstanding woman preacher at the North Congregational Church in Nantucket. Douglas-Lithgow, the historian, states that "during her ministry she attracted the largest congregation ever known in the Church". She was not only an able preacher but a distinguished writer and a "prolific writer of graceful verse" as well. Among her writings about Nantucket are Eunice Hussey, 1895, and a book of poems By the Sea, 1893. A bronze memorial tablet with an inscription about her life and work is on the side wall of the Congregational Church in Nantucket.

#19 was at one time owned by Alfred Macy, a prominent attorney and public official. He was also a very successful teacher, being at one time principal of the South Grammar School and for several years from 1854 principal of the new Coffin School. In 1861 he was appointed Collector of the Port of Nantucket and in 1871 elected one of the Governor's Council. He died in 1874, having been chosen for a fourth term. (Abstract: History of Nantucket by Godfrey.)

#21 was owned mostly by families of wealth. One of them was George B. Upton who was a founder of the Old Corner Book Store in Boston.

#23 was at one time owned by Edward M. Gardner, who was Judge of Probate.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph in Monograph on Nantucket, Champion Coated Paper Company, April 26, 1921, page 20; early view of Orange Street, with Block at left in Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast by Samuel Adam Drake, New York: Harper and Bros., 1876; 1834 Map of Town of Nantucket, showing shape of houses and house lots; photograph of Block in Ninty-Five Per Cent Perfect by Everett U. Crosby, Nantucket: Tetaukimmo Press, 1939;

2. Bibliography:

Douglas-Lithgow, Robert A. Nantucket, a History. New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914.

Godfrey, Edward K. The Island of Nantucket. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1882.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin  
Nantucket, Massachusetts  
July 1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement: Numbers 15 - 23 Orange Street form a complex of five wood-frame row houses of two-and-a-half stories with full basements, gable roofs paralleling the street with two dormers in the east roof slope of each house, clapboard siding at street elevations with cedar shingles at ends and rear. Combined wood stoops and carpenter classic doorways, shutters and six-over-six windows provide unity in the street facade. Excellent condition.
- B. Description of the Exterior:
1. Overall dimensions: 83' - 0" by 120' - 5" at the maximum projections.
  2. Foundations: Brick painted black at street elevation, stone at side and rear walls.
  3. Wall construction: Wood frame, horizontal clapboard and shingles, corner and base boards.
  4. Porches, stoops and bulkheads:
    - a. Front stoops; stair at each side with balustrade at stairs and across platform dividing stoop to form separate entrance for each house; square newels and balusters; storage closets or access to full basements below stoops.
    - b. Bulkheads providing access to basements arc off rear yards.
    - c. Porches: Projecting porch and bay at #23 are late nineteenth century additions, gothic revival ornamentation.
  5. Chimneys: Brick chimneys in end and common walls serve fireplaces in principal spaces and basement (kitchen), miscellaneous chimneys in ells.
  6. Openings:
    - a. Doorways and doors: Carpenter classic doorway trim; common wall faced with pilaster between sidelights and doorways, common entablature and cornice; four-pane overdoor, five-pane side lights; some doorways have two louvered shutters per opening, panel doors.
    - b. Windows: Windows in street facade are six-over-six, plank frame, louvered shutters; most east windows (at street level) have interior shutters which fold into the reveals, window frames are plank and board; bay window at second floor projects over stoop to form porch at entry #23; miscellaneous bay windows and sash types in appendages to all houses.

7. Roof: Gable roof parallels street, asphalt shingle covering; boxed cornice, wood gutter, sheet metal downspouts let into iron pipes to drain under sidewalks and opening in curb or to stone splash blocks; two dormers per house let into east slope of roof, six-over-six windows; scuttles in west slope of roof.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: Originally rectangular in plan, each row house has appendages to the west or rear as ells and sheds, usually to accommodate dining spaces, kitchens and storage. Kitchens were originally in the basements with access from the exterior and stairs off the hall. Hall extends from front to rear, with stairways to basement, second and garret floors. The parlor and diningrooms, originally separated by two sliding doors and closets are at one side. Second floor plan reflect the first floor spaces with bedrooms at one side and in ell; front stair halls usually converted to bedroom, sitting room or bath. Garrets are finished out with plaster to provide additional sleeping spaces and bathrooms.
2. Stairways: Front stairways are L-shaped with winders or landing near second floor, turned newels with German silver disc let into top of lower newel, square balusters, round handrail with volute at lower newel, decorated stringer. Simple service stairways to basement and second floor.
3. Flooring: Wide pine boards, natural or painted, some covered with wood strips.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, painted and papered.
5. Doorways and doors: Parlor and diningroom separated by two sliding paneled doors recessed into wall behind closets; doors are two, four and six panel; simple carpenter classic trim.
6. Decorative trim: Limited to fireplace mantels, paneled doors, interior shutters, beaded edged posts at second floor level and to front stairways.
7. Notable hardware: Typical of period including brass and iron thumb latches, brass knockers, Nantucket wood bar and thumb latch, and crystal and brass doorknobs.
8. Mechanical equipment: Fireplaces in principal spaces are usually in a classical motif, pilasters and entablature with cornice shelf, brick and cement hearths; #17 has gas light chandeliers in parlor and diningroom, gas cook stove in kitchen. Typical old kitchen fireplaces in basements are of brick construction and have "dutch" ovens, wood boxes, and

cooking cranes. Modern oil-fired hot water system are typical in the complex.

#### SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The row houses of the Orange Street Block face east, are located at the edge of the brick sidewalk. Yards to the rear (west) are defined by picket, board and rail fences, hedges by adjacent buildings. All houses have access to a common way to the west. Landscaping is informal.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A.  
Nantucket, Massachusetts  
August 1970

#### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as a part of the Orange and Union Streets Neighborhood Study (MASS-1014) made in the summer of 1970 by the Historic American Buildings Survey on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the fifth summer project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., of the University of Florida. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.